

# The Faithful Steward

A Newsletter of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America

"We are all called to be faithful and wise stewards, ever waiting for the coming of our Lord." LUKE 12:40-46

## The Bible: Myth or History?

By Scott Ashley  
(*Bible and Spade*, 15.3 2002)

You've read the articles. You've watched the reports and listened to the stories. Routinely they allege or at least suggest that the Bible isn't really believable. By now everyone knows that these reports imply the Bible's stories could not have happened the way they are written. After all, plenty of reporters, professors, and scientists tell us such is the case—that the Bible is mostly myth.

But is it? Or is a different myth being foisted off on us?

### A Shift to Unbelief

For many centuries, people simply assumed that everything in the Bible was true. But then, from the late 1600s through the 1800s, a series of scientific discoveries came to light that many assumed contradicted

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## Sacred Music: Its Nature and Function

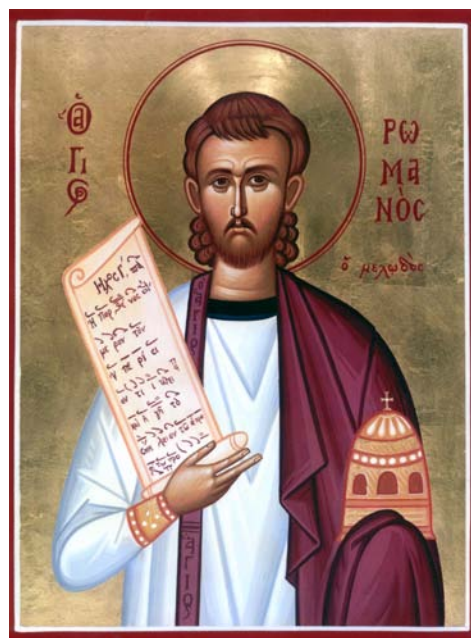
(*The Word*, February, 1989)

All sorts of theories have been advanced to explain the origin of music in human culture. One thing is certain: throughout recorded history until only recently, music was not an independent art form but connected to some other activity: religious ceremony, military and court functions, drama, dancing, courting and wedding rights, and even work. The word "music" derives from the Greek *mousike*, the art of the *muse*, which in ancient Greece referred to a combination of poetry, acting, dancing, and musical

sounds. Apparently music throughout most of history was an associate art, yet in that association it was an essential ingredient for heightening or intensifying the activity.

Ultimately music did not originate with man; it has always been inherent in nature. Since man is a part of nature, then, theories concerning its origin are rather pointless. It is enough to say that what we call music, the sequential

expressions of pitched sounds in rhythmic patterns, is a part of human nature because it is found in the nature of the cosmos in general. Thus its origin is in the creative wisdom of God.



St. Romanus the Melodist

Saint Gregory of Sinai, speaking of music in the Church, said: "Psalmody has been given to us that we may rise from the sensory to the intellectual and true."<sup>1</sup> Sacred music is uplifting, and there is a decided transforming power in it. It is grounded in matter—since all sounds proceed from

vibrations of something material—yet the effect is uplifting beyond the sensory to a higher plane. And because music always requires the element of time, it is by nature an *event*. It is dynamic rather than fixed, a flowing movement rather than a "still life." More than any other art, then, it carries the possibility of change, of transformation. In the case of genuinely spiritual music, it can elevate from the sensory to the sublime. As usual, St.

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the Bible. In reality they didn't contradict the Bible, but only the common assumptions religious leaders and others had made about the Bible.

However, the damage caused by these false assumptions had been done, and the Bible had been discredited in the eyes of many. In the mid 1800's, Charles Darwin proposed the theory of evolution which many intellectuals quickly latched onto as a way to explain the existence of a creation without a Creator. His theory quickly found fertile ground and paved the way for a widespread belief in a creation without a Creator.

It wasn't long before many intellectuals, particularly those teaching in European universities, began to "deconstruct" the Bible. They soon concluded that, among other things, the books of the Bible couldn't have been written by their reputed authors—and, for that matter, the Bible couldn't have been written until hundreds of years after their lifetimes. All in all, they decided, the Bible's stories and characters were simply a collection of myths and legends pieced together by writers many centuries after they supposedly happened.

For them the Bible was only a collection of ancient fables no different from the timeworn myths of any other ancient tribal history. Sadly, their thinking not only persists to our day, but permeates the curricula of many universities. Students are saturated with these ideas by professors who aggressively promote an anti-Bible bias. That bias now pervades the mass media and most of the scientific community.

Richard Dawkins, professor of zoology at Oxford University, is an

aggressive proponent of evolution whose contemptuous view of the Biblical creation account is typical of those who dismiss the Bible as being the inspired truth of God. He writes,

Nearly all peoples have developed their own creation myth and the Genesis story is just the one that happened to have been adopted by one particular tribe of Middle Eastern herders. It has no more special status than the belief of a particular West African tribe that the world was created from the excrement of ants.

### **Critics Formulate Their Own Myths**

So which is it? Is the Bible the revelation of man's Creator, as it claims to be? Is it an accurate history of ancient peoples—men and women who lived long ago whose stories were recorded for us—or is it a patchwork collection of fables?

Critics of the Bible have long ridiculed its value as a historical document. For decades many vehemently argued that the Hebrew Scriptures couldn't be what they claimed to be since, according to these critics, the art of writing dated back only to about 1000 BC—around the time of Israel's King David.

Anything earlier than a few centuries BC, they argued, was unreliable oral tradition at best and wildly exaggerated mythmaking at worst. Thus they could safely dismiss the entire Old Testament as any sort of reliable historical document. The events of Genesis, the Exodus from Egypt, King David and his exploits, stories of armies

and empires, the kings of Israel and Judah and so much more—all, they said, were nothing but fable.

Although critics of the Bible still abound, fewer and fewer are willing to make the same arguments on those same grounds. Why? The evidence grows daily that the modern-day mythmakers were wrong—spectacularly wrong.

### **Empires Emerge From the Sands of Time**

Rather than accept the Bible's witness as true until proven wrong, critics took the position that the Bible is untrue until proven otherwise—a way of thinking that, regrettably, permeates the minds of many scholars and thinkers to this day. But is their bias justified?

Evidence for the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible began to surface virtually the instant archaeologists started to scratch the surface of the Biblical lands in the mid 1800's.

One of the earliest of these scientific explorers was the American Edward Robinson. He identified the location or ruins of literally hundreds of Biblical towns and cities by a remarkably simple method: He simply talked to the Arab inhabitants, who had preserved the traditional names of the locations in their own tongue for centuries. Subsequent excavations at many of these sites have proven they were correct; the names were indeed passed on accurately over many generations.

Shortly after Robinson's first forays into the Holy Land, English, German, and French excavators began to explore ruins in what is today Iraq. Their finds were staggering. They uncovered not only the great cities of the Assyrian and

Babylonian empires mentioned in the Bible, but palaces and monuments of the very kings recorded in the Scriptures. Some even contained accounts of military campaigns that matched the Bible's, as well as carvings depicting the actual battles.

### **A Lost People Emerges**

Another major shock to those who maintained that the Bible was myth was the 1876 discovery of proof of an entire empire that had been lost to history. Though they are mentioned 47 times in the Bible, many scholars had come to regard the Hittites as simply a fable.

However, the discovery of inscribed clay tablets at a Turkish site led to an excavation that uncovered a fortified citadel, five temples, enormous stone sculptures and a room containing more than 10,000 tablets.

Says archaeologist and author Randall Price:

Once they were finally deciphered it was announced to the world that the Hittites had been found! [The site] had in fact been the ancient capital of the Hittite empire ... The rediscovery of this lost people, one of the most outstanding achievements in Near Eastern archaeology, now serves as a caution to those who doubt the historicity of particular Biblical accounts.

By no means are these the only people and empires mentioned in the Bible whose existence has since been proved by the archaeologist's spade. As more sites have been

explored, many more peoples and even specific individuals recorded in the Scriptures have been verified as real.

### **Proof that Biblical Figures were Real**

As recently as a decade ago, some argued that Israel's most famous king, David, was but a myth. The record of the Bible was not good enough, they insisted; proof of his existence must be found elsewhere.

In 1993 that proof emerged when Israeli archaeologists discovered an inscription that referred to the royal dynasty David founded. Recorded on a monument some 150 years after David's death, the inscription commemorates the victory of the king of Damascus over the forces of Israel and their king, who was "of the house [dynasty] of David."

Over the years, dozens of artifacts and inscriptions bearing the names of individuals mentioned in the Bible have been uncovered. In 1982 a cache of 51 ancient baked-clay seals that were used to bind papyrus or parchment scrolls was uncovered in a Jerusalem excavation. One bore the impression of the seal of "Gemaryahu [Gemariah] the son of Shaphan." This same "Gemariah, the son of Shaphan," was a scribe in the court of Judah's king Jehoiakim as mentioned in Jeremiah 36: 10-12. 25-26.

In 1975 another hoard of seals emerged, apparently uncovered in unauthorized digging in Jerusalem. One bore the name of Ishmael, the man who assassinated Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians after they destroyed Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:25).

Even more surprising, another seal bore the name "Berekhyahu [Baruch] son of Neriyaahu [Neria] the scribe." This man was none other than "Baruch the scribe," trusted friend, confidant and scribe of Jeremiah the prophet (Jer 36:4-32; 43:1-6; 45:1-2).

As if that were not astounding enough, another seal in a private collection in England was found to bear not only Baruch's name but a fingerprint along one edge—apparently Baruch's own fingerprint from when he impressed his seal into the soft clay some 2,600 years ago!

These are only a few of the finds that prove specific people mentioned in the Bible—many only in an incidental way—were indeed real and lived at the exact time and in the exact location in which the Bible places them. A complete list of such finds would fill many pages of this magazine.

### **Other Finds Foil Critics' Claims**

What about the critics' assertion that the Bible couldn't have been written when it claimed to be because the ancient Hebrews didn't know how to write at that time? This assumption was demolished in 1979 when, in the course of excavating a tomb in Jerusalem from the seventh century BC, archaeologists discovered two tiny gray cylinders.

The objects turned out to be silver foil amulets covered with delicately etched Hebrew characters. When deciphered they were found to contain most of the words of the blessing recorded in Numbers 6:24-26. This remarkable find proved that not only did the ancient Hebrews know how to write centuries earlier than critics

said they did, but one of the oldest portions of the Bible was obviously in use at a time well before the critics maintained it had been written!

### What Does This Mean For You?

One by one the claims of the critics have fallen as new archaeological discoveries have come to light. These finds have repeatedly demonstrated the truthfulness of the Bible. This article has touched on only a few of the discoveries that verify the Biblical record; many books and articles have been published that catalog many more.

We can be sure that even more evidence will emerge as the sands of time continue to be sifted in that ancient land. As the distinguished Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck eventually came to conclude, no archaeological discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements in Scripture.

### An Ancient Inscription Proves King David Was Real

For many years, some critics have asserted that many Biblical figures, including King David, are nothing more than myth. But in 1993 a dramatic find again forced Bible critics to retreat. A team of archaeologists digging in northern Galilee found an inscription dated from the ninth century BC that referred both to the "House of David" and to the "King of Israel" (see "'David' Found at Dan," *Biblical-Archaeology Review*, March/April 1994: 26).

This discovery was sensational enough to make the front page of *The New York Times*. The inscription also shows that Israel and Judah were important kingdoms in the ninth century B.C., disproving

the position of scholars who claimed Israel and Judah were never nations of significance and even disputed that there had ever been a united monarchy under David.

Although this is one more piece of evidence that refutes the arguments of those who have rejected Biblical history, we must realize it is impossible to verify every Biblical event through archaeology. Much of the original evidence no longer exists. Many perishable materials have long since disappeared. Looking for physical evidence of a particular person is like looking for a needle in an enormous haystack.

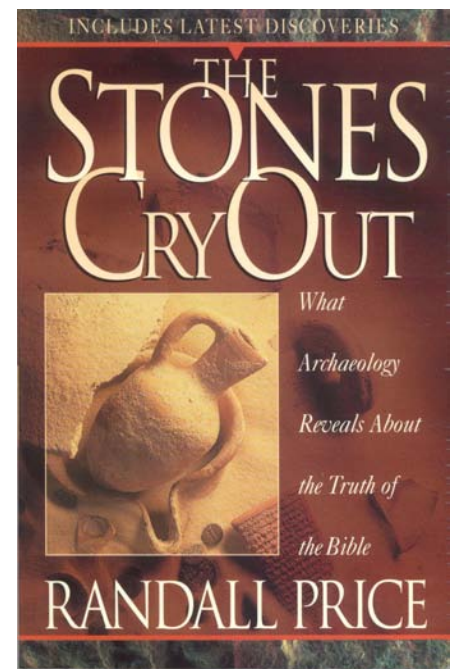
In spite of those difficulties, David joins many other kings of Israel and Judah whose names were recorded in inscriptions that have been found from neighboring nations, among them Ahab, Ahaz, Ahaziah, Hezekiah, Hoshea, Jehoiachin, Jehu, Manasseh, Menahem, Omri, Pekah, and Uzziah.

We must keep in mind the relatively small amount of the archaeological record that scientists have uncovered. Excavations will, without a doubt, continue to uphold the events of the Bible. In spite of the relative paucity of evidence that has been uncovered, that which has been found has supported the Bible.

British historian Paul Johnson observes a shift in thinking concerning even the most ancient events recorded in the Bible: "... The science of modern archaeology and historical philology actually provides verification of the most ancient Biblical texts. Whereas throughout the 19th century and almost up to the Second World War, systematic criticism of the Old Testament texts tended to destroy

their historicity, and to reduce the Pentateuch, in particular, to mere myth or tribal legend, the trend over the last half-century has been quite in the opposite direction. The Flood, for instance, has been restored to history. Archaeological discovery provides now a firm historical background to the patriarchal society described in the Book of Genesis."

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*Were Sodom and Gomorrah real cities that were destroyed in catastrophic firestorms?*

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This 437 pp. book with 78 photos, charts and illustrations tells you. Also included are: Study aids, Notes, Indices, a list of museums that possess biblical artifacts, a thorough Glossary and a list of books for further reading.

# The Christian's Attitude Towards His Passions

By Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov  
(*Ascetical Essays*, Part IV)

It is not possible that the passions dwelling within a man not be revealed in his thoughts, words, and deeds. These exposures of the passions, when they are accompanied by captivity of any sort, are called and acknowledged as falls on the battle-field of true Christian asceticism which strives at attaining to perfection. They are healed by speedy repentance.

Such falls are the inevitable trait of the oldness of old Adam, of human nature which is fallen and infected by sin. He who has just begun the life of asceticism especially cannot avoid being taken by sinful thoughts, phantasies and feelings; he cannot but sin by means of sinful thoughts, phantasies and feelings. These transgressions are healed by speedy repentance.

Here we are not talking about falls into mortal sin or about a life of voluntary sin, which is in its entirety one single fall. Here we are talking about lighter falls which occur on account of our infirmity, and which are known as pardonable sins, from which even the righteous were not free.

Scripture testifies: "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" [by means of repentance] (Prov. 24:16). Corresponding to one's purification through repentance so are the attractions to sin diminished, although at the same time these become more subtle and less easy to recognize. Sometimes they deceive and dupe even men who are filled with Divine grace (I Chron. 21:1). These

enticements to sin preserve one from high-mindedness and serve as a cause for humility. They keep us on the saving pasture of repentance. (St. Nilus Sorsky, *Homily 3*).

In examining ourselves from such a vantage point of self-knowledge, we ought to preserve the peace of our soul and in no way be agitated or despondent nor become confused when the workings of the passions reveal themselves in us. Sometimes they act very strongly, whilst at other times their action is very slight. Let us manfully set ourselves in opposition to the passions.

**The passions will  
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They will not cease to rise up and attack us until the lid of the coffin. Let us prepare ourselves for a life-long opposition to them with the firm conviction that we cannot always be victors over the passions, but that by natural necessity we must be subjected to involuntary defeats. These very defeats aid our progress when they support and strengthen in us repentance and the humility which is born therefrom.

Let us not believe our victories over the passions nor let us be ecstatic over these victories. The passions, like the demons that employ them as weapons, are cunning. They give the appearance of being conquered in order that we might become high-minded, and by

reason of this they might have the easier and more decisive victory over us.

Let us prepare ourselves to view both our victories and our defeats in the same way: courageously, calmly, and dispassionately.

Have you been captivated by sinful phantasies, have you taken pleasure in sinful thoughts, pronounced some idle, foolish word, eaten too much, or done some other similar thing? Do not be perturbed, do not grow faint-hearted, do not add evil to evil. (*The Spiritual Instructions of the Blessed Elder Seraphim of Sarov*, Ch. 10). Quickly repent before God, the Knower of Hearts. Endeavour to correct yourself and to work towards perfection. Be convinced of the necessity of keeping a strict watch over yourself, and of preserving peace of soul, continue your spiritual journey adamantly and with firm resolve.

Our salvation is our God—not our own works. By works of faith, that is, by the fulfilment of the commandments of the Gospel, we show the truth of our faith and our loyalty to God.

Pay no heed to thoughts of false humility which after your allurements by sin and your fall suggest to you that you have angered your God to the point of no return, that God has turned His face away from you, abandoned and forgotten you. Recognize the source of these thoughts by their fruits; despondency, and a slackening or abandonment of the spiritual struggle.

*Continued in next issue*



John Chrysostom expresses it best: "Nothing uplifts the soul so much and gives it wings and liberates it from the earth and releases it from the fetters of the body and makes it aspire after wisdom and deride all the cares of this life as the melody of unison and rhythm-possessing songs."<sup>2</sup>

Music, then, by its very nature has power to uplift and transform the human heart. It is most natural to employ song when one desires to refresh and "recreate" the soul. And this recreation occurs most certainly and most deeply when one's sole aim in singing is to glorify God.

Now, obviously *all* music does not have as its end the glory of God and the recreation of the human soul. In fact, today most music is unmistakably "secular"—music for entertainment, for dancing, for "background" during work or driving or shopping—for any number of activities unrelated to God. There is even a large (and lucrative) segment of contemporary music which is consciously *against* God and which seeks to glorify the lowest instincts and appetites of man. And most distressing, the extreme secularity of the present age has resulted in the introduction of profane, worldly styles of music in many churches.

It is sad to notice that the vast bulk of "music" produced day after day in our own time and broadcast *ad nauseam* over the electronic media neither glorifies God nor elevates man. It does not even seek these aims. It at once reflects and feeds the overtly profane and secular culture in which we live. Just as a human who is overcome by sin and is unrepentant is not fulfilling his own nature, so profane music does not fulfill its

own nature. Perhaps one might, therefore, more appropriately term it "anti-music."

For those who still accept the traditional Christian revelation concerning the nature of man and his role as king and priest within creation, there can be no joy or satisfaction in any art which ignores or denies or is divorced from God: music least of all, because of its natural potentiality for lifting up the mind and heart. Music can reflect the harmony of heaven; it can provide us on earth with a foretaste of the splendor of the Age to Come. *Sacred music*, then, is true music, reflecting as it does the deepest truths of God and man: that the universe is not self-created or self-sustaining, but created by God and filled with His Presence.

The Christian practice of worship included sacred music from the very beginning. At the Lord's

**The nature of sacred music is to draw mortals to the immortal Throne of God where all harmony and beauty begin and end.**

Supper when our Lord Jesus instituted the Mystery of His precious Body and Blood, He and His disciples sang a hymn before they departed to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). And St. Paul, writing to the "faithful saints" in Ephesus, advised: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." (Ephesians 5:18-19).

The early Christians simply continued the Judaic heritage of chanting psalms, adding gradually

new hymns which were specifically Christian in content. The notion that sacred music developed only after the age of the early Church persecutions is quite erroneous. In fact, it was through psalms and hymns that the intense band of the faithful expressed their strength and joy in the Risen Lord during those long years of persecution. When the Church finally did emerge from that difficult era, its music continued and flourished as before.

During the age of the Seven Ecumenical Councils (4th-8th Centuries), music in the Church received its definitive structure and character. Some of the more clever heretics in that era knew well the power of music to capture human hearts. They shrewdly expressed their false doctrines in lively, catchy melodies which spread quickly among the people. But the character of the tunes, consonant with the falsity of their content, echoed the music of the theater and circus. In opposition to the heretics, the Church Fathers formulated guidelines for the music to be used in Orthodox worship.

The main features of Orthodox sacred music defined during the Great Councils are still the canonical norms for church music today. They are outlined as follows:

First and most obviously, the music is purely vocal. No accompanying organ or other instruments are used. The human voice alone glorifies God. There are a number of reasons for this. During the formative years of the Church, the organ, along with other musical instruments, were associated with the theater and circus; they evoked the whole atmosphere of pagan frivolity and licentiousness for the Christian. Even in the Western

Church until the 15th Century instruments were not permitted. As late as the 16th Century in the West, the organ was hardly more than tolerated, the music being still mainly *a cappella*.

The deeper objection to instruments was that their use was considered not consonant with the spiritual nature of Christian worship. In the past Jewish worship *had* included them, but only as an accommodation to human weakness, to the spiritual imperfection of the man under the old Law. St. John Chrysostom said in this regard: "David formerly sang in psalms, we today also sing with him; he had a lyre with lifeless strings, the Church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre, with a different tone, indeed, but with a more accordant piety."<sup>3</sup> Christian worship is higher and more perfect by virtue of the perfect revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Musical instruments are of the imperfect realm of this "world"; they are lifeless, mechanical and ostentatious; they introduce into the character of the services a contrived, sensuous, theatrical element. The lyre of "living strings," the pure human voice because of its flexibility, its warmth and the deep feeling it can express, is the sole worthy instrument in the more perfect worship of the "New Israel." Jesus Christ has inaugurated a new age, the New Creation where the faithful now worship in "spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

The second main characteristic is that the music, being wholly vocal, is completely wed to the text. The text, in fact, is paramount, the words and their meaning suggesting the very contour and

rhythm of the music. Since the Orthodox Church knows of no sacred music without words, it is from the text and for the text that the melody proceeds. The music is a holy chant, not measured by any regular or contrived meter. There are, therefore, in Orthodox musical history, no hymnwriters who were simply professional musicians; they were rather liturgical poets whose basic task was neither music nor poetry, but prayer. They were without exception ascetical, mystical fathers. And the content of their hymnology is never subjectivistic, but rather objective declarations of Orthodox doctrine. Each verse, each troparion, each sticharon is a marvelous poetic statement of the Faith. The services, especially Vespers and Matins, are replete with these hymns, "strung together with *Glorias* and broken verses from the psalms like pearls on a string."<sup>4</sup> Even in the more rare cases where the personal pronoun "I" appears (as more often in the Lenten Triodion), the hymns maintain their basic objectivity.

Just as there is no liturgical music without words, so too there are during worship no words without music. Besides the formal hymnology itself, everything else is chanted [or recited] psalmodically—all psalms, all readings, all prayers, the Creed, everything. The phenomena in American churches of reading in an unpitched monotone or in a dramatic voice, or of congregational recitation of portions of the Services are influences from protestant worship, having no basis or precedent in the whole history of Orthodox corporate worship. This unfortunate development may be seen as a move towards the secularization of the

Orthodox liturgical tradition.

One aspect of Orthodox sacred music which has all but fallen out of use in American parishes must also be mentioned. This is singing antiphonically. The practice of two choirs singing alternately is a tradition which became firmly established in the early Church. It has both practical and spiritual advantages. Practically it enables the chanters to sing a long time without fatigue since they alternately sing and rest throughout the services. And spiritually this practice brightens and enlivens the services, keeping the congregation, as Constantine Cavarinos points out, "in a state of inner wakefulness."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the unbroken history of the Orthodox Church, whether or not these basic features of sacred music have been fulfilled totally in every local church, the ideals stand as a guide for all to follow. No individual, no local community has the right to abridge or ignore these canonical standards. Each generation must embrace anew the wisdom of the musical tradition, so that church singing may continue to fulfill (or return to) its proper and sacred role in public worship. Such a fulfillment is a fulfillment of the very nature of music. And it is the nature of music to draw mortals to the immortal Throne of God where all harmony and beauty begin and end.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Constantine Cavarinos' *Byzantine Sacred Music*, Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, Boston, 1956, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Migne, ed. *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 55, Column 56.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *The Story of Christian Hymnody*, E.E. Ryden, Augustana Press, Rock Island, Ill., 1959, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> R.M. French, *The Eastern Orthodox Church*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1961, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> Constantine Cavarinos, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

## Father Joachim of Mount Athos (+8/21 March 2003)

On Monday of Saint Gregory Palamas week, March 11/24, 2003, we celebrated the Memorial Service for the renowned Athonite Elder and confessor, Hieromonk Joachim, of St. Euthymius Skete. He reposed on Friday March 8/21, in the desert at the end of the peninsula, next to the Cave of St. Nilus the Myrrhstreamer.

I met Father Joachim in January 2000 under challenging circumstances. A blizzard had blown up after the small boat carrying me from Daphne to Kausokalybia had left port. Instead of disembarking at the Kausokalybia port, the boat discharged all passengers at the port of Katounakia, far distant from my intended destination. By the time I had clambered up a sharp ascent from sea level to the top of a rock face along lightly-indented steps cut into the rock, the snowfall was thickening alarmingly, cutting off the mid-afternoon light and leaving me wondering when—and eventually if—I would find shelter before sundown locked all the gates on Athos.

Although I arrived after sundown, the famous zealot Skete of Saint Basil had left its gate open. I was given room in an upstairs hall usually occupied by one of the many young novices crowding this small facility in recent years. More than half the monks on Athos live in the deserts, not in the ruling monasteries; and the vast majority of the desert-dwelling monks will not commemorate the ecumenist Patriarch of Constantinople, an issue which divides the contemporary Athonite community.

By morning, the snowfall was a

meter deep on an average, and the Skete Fathers forbade me to attempt to continue my journey. But by 8 a.m. I had convinced them that the inexorableness of a fixed-date airline return ticket necessitated my attempt to move on. Promising to return at the first sign of trouble, and fortified by toast, jam, raki, and several cups of hot “nes”, (the updated form of coffee on the Holy Mountain), I set out, arriving at the catholicon of the great Kausokalybia settlement on



Elder Joachim

the eve of the Feast of Saint Maximus of Kausokalybia. His intense freedom from attachment to the comforts of this world gave this skete its name: he periodically burned down the hut he happened to be living in, with all its contents (they could not have been many, given the austerity of this monk)

and moved on.

He had lived around these steep, forbidding parts in the 14th century, he was a contemporary of our Saint Gregory of Sinai. A famous conversation held by these two great hesychasts, recorded by a disciple, forms part of our modern *Philokalia*. I spent the festal eve with the Fathers of this Skete, well-supplied with a feast prepared for an expected 100 pilgrims, none of whom came given the storm. I slept in a large guest dormitory—also well furnished for the multitudes—by myself. Early the next morning, after the Liturgy and another overly-laden table, I went to a cave once inhabited (and not burnt!) by Saint Maximus, and thence on to the Skete of Saint Euthymius, laden with greetings from a monk in Boston who had lived with Father Joachim for some time, and with other greetings and gifts.

Father Joachim was ill when I arrived but insisted in sitting up in the spartan *arkhondariki*—the guest reception room—in a very small, dilapidated stone building, in process of rehabilitation by the four or five young monks and novices who formed his Brotherhood. While reduced to a real minimum, the building, its rooms and furnishings were scrupulously clean. The small guest area, accommodating five guests, was thankfully supplied with a small wood stove to take the damp chill out of the low-ceilinged room in the evening.

The first thing one noticed about the Elder was his voice—clearly coming from within yet, at the same time, in a most amazing



way, coming from a place not within himself—truly a voice from another age. He was always entirely calm, and fixed his attention both on the Skete's daily activities, and on its guests; at the same time, but on a deeper level, his attention was always clearly somewhere else. It was an entirely wonderful two-hour conversation, made more wondrous by his strange gift for making himself understood to someone not fluent in Greek.

Father Joachim was a strikingly handsome old man, and shows up here and there in the standard photograph books on Athos—twice in a volume called “Athonite Moments” published in German and English, on page 101 (over the caption, “*Fromme Gestalt*—A Sainly image”) and on page 196 (over the caption, “*Asketen*”—“Ascetics”). The photographs are accurate and show a face dominated by large, iconic eyes, just as he really was in life, his austere face framed with a great white beard and hair. The photographer saw what truly was to be found in that face, in those eyes—meekness, humility, charity, and the courage that these virtues engender—a face, really, on which is written St. John of Sinai's wonder-working book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a face on which is imprinted the Gospel, for which he had ears with which to hear. What the photos do not capture is the transparency of the face and hands.

Any who can consult these books will also see, in the photo on page 196, one of his own monks, in fact his eldest monastic son, Father Euthymius, to the far left (the other two are neatly-attired visitors from elsewhere). It was the vigorous

Monk Euthymius who acted as my guide in the immediate region of St. Euthymius Skete, taking me on a hair-raising climb down into the Cave of Saint Nilus the Myrrh-streamer on my first two visits, he skipping like a goat, and me lagging far behind in vertiginous terror at the great height of the place and the sheer drop into the sea.

In discussions of the contemporary crisis in the Church at large and on Athos, Father Joachim was dispassionate, never evincing the slightest anger or passion of any kind, but always maintaining a complete and, one could say, saturated peace, reminding me of that peace in the heart spoken of by St. Seraphim of Sarov. When mention was made of some clear breach of faith on the part of Bishops or Athonites still claiming the name of Orthodoxy while embracing the heresy of ecumenism, he would quietly point heavenward and say in the mildest voice, “O *Theos*” (God), or again, “God will judge.”

**An air of quiet, sober joy permeated the place where prayer without ceasing reigned in the hearts of all who dwelt there.**

When a currently-famous remark of a well-known Elder, to the effect that the Virgin Mary had advised the man, in a vision, to support the program of the current Ecumenical Patriarch was repeated, clearly not for the first time, in his hearing Father Joachim said, again in an entirely uncombative voice but with firmness and with the complete confidence that comes only from an authentically humble

heart, “*Psemmata*” (Lies). It was very odd to hear such a strong word of condemnation spoken with a complete absence of rancor, bitterness or anger: it was not only Father Joachim's face that was “iconic”!

Father Joachim had a great respect for the founder of the venerable Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline—Archimandrite Panteleimon—and spoke of his remarkable achievement in founding a truly Athonite house in the uncongenial environment of the contemporary, paganized culture of the U.S. He was particularly concerned that his admiration and support for Father Panteleimon and his work be realized.

I visited again in January of 2001, and last year in July. With each visit, I became more familiar with this small, intense community, some of whom hailed from traditional Orthodox families in villages, and two of whom were the sons of new calendarist families in Thessalonica. Quiet, self-effacing, given to the days of hard work required for survival in the desert of the Athonite peninsula, without self-pity or sentimental expression. An air of quiet, sober joy permeated the place where prayer without ceasing reigned in the hearts of all who dwelt there.

When, a few years ago, Father Joachim made the demanding trek from his Skete to Great Lavra, from which the Skete is leased, to have his youngest monk enrolled according to Athonite custom, the Fathers at Great Lavra refused to accept the name, as the policies of the current Ecumenical Patriarch had hardened against those who will not commemorate the name of an ecumenist Ecumenical Patriarch.

Father Joachim shrugged peacefully, turned and said to the young monk, “Well, the *Panagia* will enroll you” and they departed, after venerating the relics in the catholicon.

What will now be the fate of these young, dedicated monks of true confession in the increasingly polarized world of the Holy Mountain? Perhaps they will be allowed to continue their lives in this historic Skete. One of the factors motivating commemorating ruling monasteries to allow zealot non-commemorators to inhabit their sketes, *kellia* and *hesychastiria*, is the fact that the zealots take very good care of the ruling monasteries far-flung properties, rehabilitating them and providing an otherwise economically unattainable workforce, to improve the monastery’s assets.

Another is the fact that even within the ruling monasteries’ in-

house communities, there is almost everywhere a significant population in overt or covert sympathy with the zealots’ position on the matter of syncretist Ecumenism. The cold expulsion of a small house of zealots could have a disruptive effect on the home community, and simply not be worth the trouble.

But finally, the pressure to expel numbers of zealot Athonite Fathers into mainland Greece may also be restrained by memories of the 1920’s, when the expulsion of the first generation of so-called “old calendarists” into Greece merely spread the cause of rejecting the divisive—and already often ecclesiastically condemned—new calendar across the nation. No government in Athens is openly courting the galvanizing of one of the country’s most significant, if also most unreported and unacknowledged fissures, especially for a

country in as vulnerable a position geographically, socially, economically, and politically—not to mention spiritually—as contemporary Greece.

“As God wills,” would say this newly-reposed confessor of the faith, and, “God will judge.” “*Aionia i mnimi tou*,” we sing in the Memorial Service—“Eternal be his memory.” There will be many who, having sung that, will be quickly seeking the intercessions of this dispassionate, confessing monk, this quiet zealot who, already in this earthly life, was truly a heavenly man.

— Archimandrite Sergios  
St. Gregory of Sinai Monastery



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## Only Through Patience: The Struggle to Build Saint Cosmas Church

Saint Cosmas of Aitolia Orthodox Church in Maryland outside of Washington, DC, has been in existence for over twenty-two years, and during that time we have held services in a 12 x 35 foot room on the second floor of an old office building. We began as a handful of families who wanted to hear services in English instead of the Slavonic we were used to at St. John the Baptist Russian Orthodox Church in Washington. For a year or two we attended services at Fr. Michael Lightfoot's house chapel in Virginia, but his decision to move to Rhode Island gave us the impetus to organize our own English-language parish under the protection of the great missionary and equal-to-the-Apostles, St. Cosmas.

The parish of St. John's gave us permission to have Saturday night Vespers without a priest in their church hall, and we began to learn Byzantine chant. We attended Liturgy at St. John's, but on three occasions early in 1981, the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, MA, sent priests to serve a Saturday Liturgy for us in English at St. John's.

Fr. Seraphim Johnson was a deacon at that time, and after a great deal of persuasion and pressure, he agreed to be ordained our priest provided we could find a place to hold services. In March we found the room mentioned above and made arrangements to have a simple iconostasis built and installed there. In July, Father was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Gregory Grabbe during a conference at the Pillars of Ortho-

doxy Church in Mt. Holly Springs, PA. The first Liturgy at St. Cosmas was held July 26, 1981. Since then, the number of parishioners has grown from approximately fifteen to eighty-five, and there is no longer room for all of us in the church at one time.

Of course, we knew from the beginning that we needed a building of our own, but we had no funds, and everything in the Washington area is extremely expensive. So we settled into our new home, which we grew to love. We purchased brass candle stands and a baptismal font; we built benches, a large wooden cross, and a tomb for Holy Week. In March of 1989, we had our first Episcopal visit from Metropolitan Ephraim. With his encouragement we began looking in earnest for a building of our own. He told us that if we put in one gold coin, God would put in nine.

It was a discouraging search. We considered two former convenience stores, but they were far out of our price range. The houses we looked at were too small and had insufficient land to meet county requirements for parking and vegetation buffers. In 1992 we put a contract on a sizable piece of land and even had preliminary plans drawn up for a building, only to have the engineer discover that the property was partly wetlands. We lost several thousand dollars when we had to break the contract. A couple of years later we considered a large building on a good-sized lot in Bowie, MD, but it turned out to be in bad condition structurally.

Then, Ephraim Figueroa composed a beautiful supplicatory canon to St. Cosmas for us, and we began chanting it on a regular basis, asking for the Saint's help.

In 1997, one of our parishioners saw an ad in the paper for a small house on 1½ acres listed as "suitable for a church." It was a beautifully landscaped property with a dozen 200-year-old oak trees, a wooded area in back, and a multitude of daffodils and azaleas. The price was low and exactly the amount we had in the bank—\$140,000. (Our accumulating even this amount was due in large part to the generosity of Mother Anna Portaitissa, the former Anna Stratakis.) The land could have been divided into lots and eight houses built on it, thus making it worth a great deal, but the previous owner had put a covenant on it preventing any division for the span of fifty years. So no developer could lay hands on it, and we were convinced that this situation was from God. We decided that we could gut the building and enlarge it a little to make a small, but sufficient church. After receiving a blessing to buy, we were able to obtain a loan for the future building project, and in September of 1997 we purchased the property.

Then the evil one began to attack us in earnest. Not only was the county bureaucracy extremely difficult to deal with, but the neighbors were antagonistic. It took about two years for the initial building and engineering plans to be drawn up. When the neighbors discovered that the county had

mandated that the driveway enter our land from their neighborhood instead of from the main road, they were up in arms. We met with them to discuss the plans, and they were totally opposed and expressed their anger openly. They didn't want us there at all and basically wanted no changes in their neighborhood or that beautiful park-like property.

The County Planning Board finally approved our site plan, but the neighbors appealed the decision. The next step was a hearing before the County Council in March 2000, with both sides making presentations. The council's vote would decide the future of our church. Of course, we prayed a great deal, and Metropolitan Ephraim agreed to be present with us at the hearing. The neighbors' attorney was unprepared, and their animosity made a negative impression on the council. In the end, overruling the Department of Transportation, the council decided on a compromise: we could build if the driveway came in from the main street. We gave thanks to God—we had wanted the driveway off the main road in the first place—and the neighbors were mollified, but not entirely happy. Their hope had been that we would be prevented from building at all. Since then, they have reported us to the county when the grass needed to be mowed, made unpleasant comments when we were working there, complained about the sidewalk we were required to put in, and made it clear that they feel we are degrading their neighborhood. Once in a while one of them will say, "Well, we know it's your property." God willing we can win them

over eventually.

In March 2002, two years after the hearing, we finally received the permits to build. But we still could not begin construction because time had run out on our bank loan, and we were required to apply for a new loan. This process took several months. Vatica Contracting, owned by our parishioner Kyriakos Psaromatis, took charge of construction. Only the grading and part of the foundation could be finished before cold weather set in. At that time we also ordered a carved iconostasis from Greece, knowing it would take several months for it to be carved and shipped to the United States.

With the arrival of spring, 2003, things began to progress rapidly. By the end of June, the wooden framing and the roof were complete, and by September the plumbing, electrical wiring, and windows had been installed. In the early fall, work was finished on the exterior: siding, stucco, and copper domes. The interior walls were closed and ready for paint.

Then another difficulty arose. The paving company found a discrepancy in the site plan and could not make the parking lot without an engineering change and reapproval by the county. With only three weeks until the weather became too cold to apply asphalt, we again asked for prayers. The revisions took a couple of weeks and the county added an additional sidewalk on one side of the building. Now the paving company has indicated that we will have to wait until spring. This means we will not be in the new church for Pascha.

Since originally we had hoped to celebrate Nativity in our new building, this is a disappointment for us, and just another in a long line of temptations sent to teach us patience. Please keep our parish in your prayers. God willing, we will be able to welcome you all to the new Saint Cosmas Aitolos Orthodox Church sometime in 2004.





# The Resettlement of Holy Ascension Skete

By Archimandrite Adrian

The Skete of the Holy Ascension, founded four years ago by Archimandrite Adrian, was recently resettled in Cape Neddick, Maine.

Fr. Adrian, who had for many years been a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), was in the mid-1960s tonsured and ordained by St. Philaret of New York. For many years he was also Bishop Gregory (Grabbe's) secretary and personal assistant. He left ROCOR, as not a few of our clergy and faithful had over the years, because of its ecclesiological inconsistencies with its pious and Orthodox hierarchs of blessed memory.

Fr. Adrian founded the Skete in Pennsylvania not far from the parish of the Pillars of Orthodoxy in Mt. Holly Springs. After some time, as he was struggling to get the Skete on its feet, illness struck him and an already present heart problem became life threatening. The fact that the Skete was in a remote location on a mountain and in a forest made it difficult, especially with the winter snows, for him to get to the hospital and emergency medical care on the frequent occasions it proved necessary. Despite the fact that the brethren invested huge efforts into the grounds, the gardens and the house, the fruit of their own hard labor, they knew that, under the circumstances, unless some tough decisions were made, the future of the monastic brotherhood was in peril. After consultations with His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim, and receiv-

ing his blessing to do so, the brethren of the Holy Ascension Skete approached the Fathers at Holy Transfiguration Monastery and asked for a blessing to rebuild Holy Ascension Skete on a vacant lot donated by a benefactor to the monastery and adjacent to the already established Hermitage of the Holy Apostles on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean at Cape Neddick. This move provided easier access to Fr. Adrian to superior medical treatment, let alone the blessing of a closer proximity to the Fathers of Holy Transfiguration Monastery. In addition, there was

family have been parishioners at our Concord parish of the Holy Dormition for many years.

With the approval, and more importantly, the blessing of the Fathers of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, plans were then made to relocate the brethren of the Holy Ascension Skete from Pennsylvania to Cape Neddick, Maine. Much had to be done. First of all, the property and house in Pennsylvania needed to be placed on the market. A loan was negotiated to commence building a modular dwelling for the brethren plus a chapel for the daily cycle of services. Nothing came easy! One woe after another surfaced. One of the more difficult ones to come to terms with was the criminal fraud perpetrated by the contractor who was supposed to build the chapel attached to the skete. He took nearly \$20,000—money that was a portion of the recently negotiated loan and given to purchase

the building materials and supplies—and walked off with it, never intending to even begin his contracted work. This was indeed a shock which has had repercussions, not only for the brethren, but for others as well. The contractor had come so highly recommended by a parishioner living in the area who himself had the contractor build a beautiful family chapel. This difficulty was in part overcome by the open-hearted generosity of some of



*Fathers Menas and Adrian in their new chapel*

the advantage of having access to the Fathers who resided at Holy Apostles Hermitage across the lane when they were in residence. Another added bonus was the accessibility to the physician, Dr. Vassily Mihailoff, who lives close by and has known Fr. Adrian from the doctor's adolescence, when he and his family were parishioners at the ROCOR Cathedral in New York City. Dr. Mihailoff and his

our faithful but, nevertheless, necessitated further borrowing of money. The house and chapel were successfully erected after another contractor was found to build the chapel.

The monastic brethren made the successful move from Pennsylvania to Maine with the help of the parishioners of Pillars of Orthodoxy and the faithful of other parishes from Washington, D.C., New York and Massachusetts. Thus, the Fathers, the Skete's belongings, a 14-year old blind and diabetic cairn terrier named Chester, and three cats (all refugees from the streets of New York City) resettled in Cape Neddick, Maine. Although the brethren of Holy Ascension Skete have not yet been able to find a buyer for the property in Pennsylvania, and have substantial loans to repay, they are happily settled-in to their new quarters, where despite the disarray of a new dwelling and many unfinished elements, amazingly—just after a few weeks—they were already able to commence the daily cycle of services in their beautiful new chapel.

Fr. Menas joined Holy Ascension Skete almost at the time of its foundation in Pennsylvania after attending Fr. Adrian's parish in New York City where Fr. Menas was a law student at Columbia University. After his graduation (with highest honors) and over the years, as he interned for various judges, including Justice Anthony Kennedy on the U.S. Supreme Court and then while he was employed by a law firm in Washington, D.C., Fr. Menas kept up correspondence. When possible, he visited with Fr. Adrian who had continued to be his spiritual father

during this time. Fr. Menas' parents are both Greek whose origins are from the "Island of Martyrs" Chios. Eventually Fr. Menas came to live at the Skete in Pennsylvania on a permanent basis, and he helped in its support by doing legal work which would neither monopolize his monastic schedule nor take him out of the monastery. After three years as a novice at the Skete, Brother Anthony was tonsured by the Abbot on Holy Thursday, 2003, and by lot was given the name Menas, after the Great Martyr, who is also one of the beloved protectors of Holy Transfiguration Monastery. The Skete fathers will continue to try to support themselves through Fr. Menas' legal skills. Most recently, a very reputable law firm in the area has arranged employment for Fr. Menas, which will allow him to work from the Skete. Fr. Adrian is presently putting together a project of making instructional and educational videos about Orthodoxy, hoping to pique the level of interest of many, as well as to raise funds for the Skete's support.

It's now been a very few months since the move and the Fathers are still getting settled in. The kindness of so many continues to manifest itself. Someone who knew Fr. Adrian's love of flowers donated 600 Spring bulbs, which the fathers have planted around the Skete's grounds. Presently, a chimney is being erected so that the Skete can have a wood stove, which will defray the heating oil bills and will be a source of heat in the cold Maine winters when and if the electrical power fails, as it already has on occasion. It will be some time before the fathers will be able to erect a permanent iconosta-

sis, at least, not until their present debts are paid. So come Spring, they plan to put up a temporary icon screen.

Fr. Adrian mentioned that the unusual isolation on the forested mountain in Pennsylvania at the former Skete came with its own set of difficulties and temptations. Until Fr. Menas came to live at the Skete permanently, Fr. Adrian lived there alone. He mentioned that there are reasons why only experienced fathers were allowed to live the eremitic life in the wilderness. It is spiritual death for the proud or arrogant. He felt that these temptations probably exceeded his monastic abilities although there certainly were consolations. "He is comforted," he says, "to be in closer proximity to other monastic brethren," for so good and so joyous it is, that as brethren they might dwell in the unanimity of prayer and the monastic and angelic struggle. Glory be to God for all things. Amen.

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.....

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